

Colonial Williamsburg

Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
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*Discovery of
16th & 17th Century
Settlers at
Colonial
Williamsburg's
Jamestown site,
p. 38 etc.*



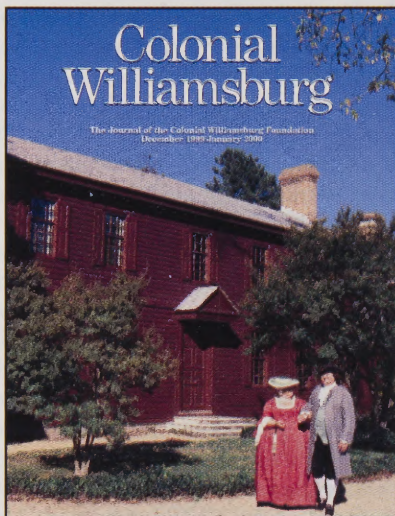


Photo Illustration Tom Green

Peyton and Betty Randolph, in the persons of character interpreters Charles Red and Lucy Smith, stroll before their re-interpreted Williamsburg home.

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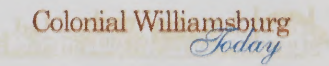
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Jamestown Rediscovered

Archaeologists Unearth More of the Storied Settlement's Past

by Will Molineux

Dave Doody

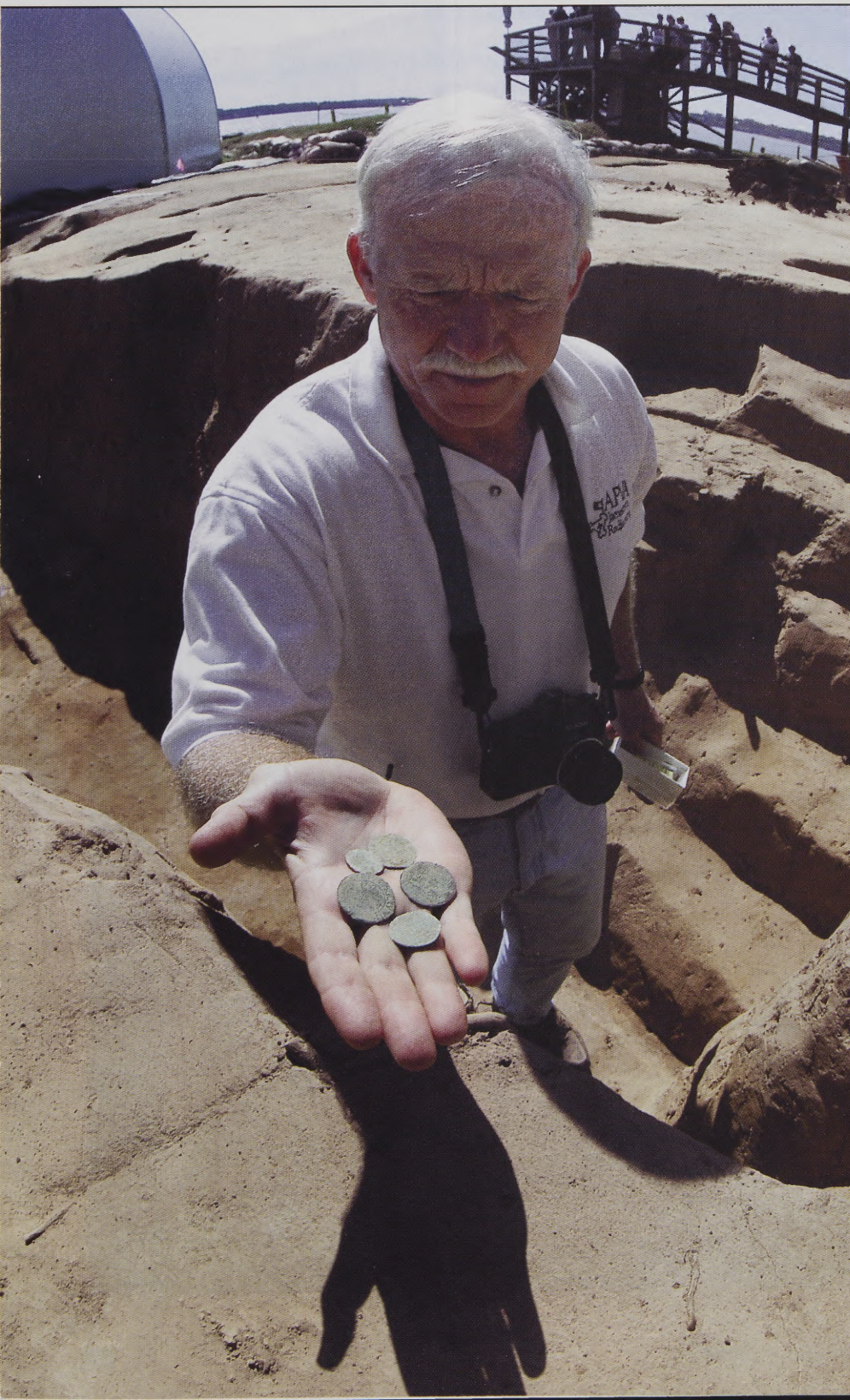
THE ARCHAEOLOGIST directing the rediscovery of Jamestown spread five dirty coin-like tokens in the palm of his hand and counted his blessings. "There's more to find here than I ever dreamed of," he said. As he spoke, Bill Kelso looked over the patches of earth scraped smooth to expose the stains and artifacts that mark the long-forgotten activities of the men and women who settled and struggled at England's first permanent New World settlement. "We could go on digging forever," Kelso said.

Kelso is in charge of the painstaking, time-consuming reinvestigation of the original settlement on Jamestown Island. He leads the Jamestown Rediscovery project mounted by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities.

The APVA owns 22.5 acres of what was a James River isthmus when the English dropped anchor in 1607. On that ground the settlers enclosed their communal hold on Virginia within a triangle of freshly cut tree trunks stuck deep in the clay-hard ground.

The palisade was a bulwark against the Spanish, who never sailed deep enough into Hampton Roads to challenge the settlers, and the Powhatan Indians, who came by land and canoe out of curiosity, friendship, and, later, retaliatory anger. The earth-fast timbers, when they rotted or the English pulled them down, left a row of dark circular stains—footprints, archaeologists call them—in the soil. Kelso discovered them in 1996 hard by the island's southerly shore. It was a contradiction of the long-lived assumption that the James had washed all the fort site away.

Archaeologist Bill Kelso, at left, in the excavated cellar house of circa 1610, displays some of the jetons uncovered nearby. Opposite right, a model of gentleman Stephen Calthrop's head gazes past a resin casting of a skull and skeleton discovered inside the fort that may have been his.



Kelso is finding all manner of 17th-century artifacts undisturbed beneath the zone of soil plowed during the 18th and 19th centuries when the island was farmed. The quantity of bits and pieces of metal, pottery, bones—scraps and fragments of man's presence and handiwork—have been uncovered in a third of an acre where Kelso and his colleagues began digging in 1994. Their goal is to sift through 2.5 acres more before the 2007 celebration of Jamestown's 400th anniversary.

A broad archaeological assessment of Jamestown Island beyond the fort has been made by archaeologists from the College of William and Mary and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. This exploratory work has been done for the National Park Service and is a follow-up to archaeological explorations made before the Jamestown Festival of 1957.

The growth of Jamestown as the colony's capital and principal port has been the special study of Audrey Horning, an archaeologist with the Foundation. A review of the island's documentary history with the goal of finding boundary lines of private property has been undertaken for the park service by independent scholar Martha McCartney.

Each object the archaeologists uncover—be it a mysterious sliver of something unidentified or a drinking jug miraculously intact—is tagged, cleaned, and studied. Each is a clue to understanding the suffering and success of the people who lived in a company town administered by English entrepreneurs.

The coin-like counters Kelso admires are jetons—tokens merchants used to make quick monetary calculations. In a sense, Kelso said, these copper discs function much like an abacus, and were piled in stacks on a board ruled much like a checkerboard. "They were just laying there scattered about—a dozen or so of them—by the brick foundation of something—we don't know what, yet—just east of the fort," he said.

Kelso displays the jetons for a gaggle of tourists who pause on the path beside his workplace. "Look, they have designs engraved on them. This one has the alphabet on it, but a few letters—vowels mostly—are missing. And there are two Zs. The extra Z is probably the mark of the maker. And here, on this one, is an engraving of a man at a counting table using jetons. This is remarkable stuff. Really neat."

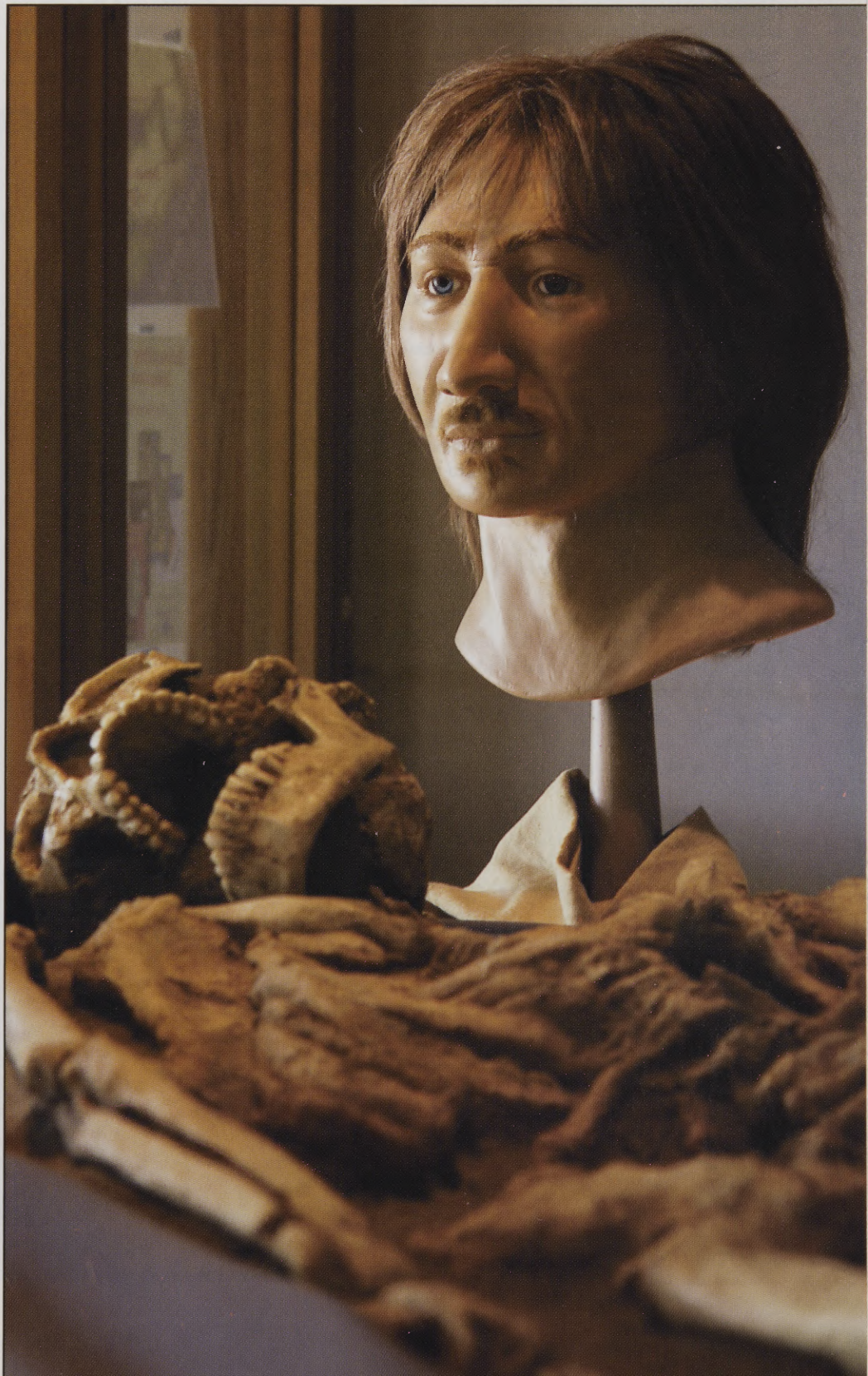
It is meaningful stuff, too.

KELSO'S ARCHAEOLOGY reveals that the Jamestown settlers were industrious. In his writings, Captain John Smith complained about lazy gentlemen and laggards dependent on corn bartered from the Native Americans. But, in Kelso's mind, the amount and variety of artifacts prove that Smith's oft-cited remarks

do not fairly characterize all of the Jamestown adventurers. Half of the first 104 or 105 settlers aboard the *Susan Constant*, *Godspeed*, and *Discovery* were artisans, craftsmen, and tradesmen, although a few were farmers.

"Look," he said to emphasize his point. "It was an experiment just to sail across the ocean in 1607. It was an exper-

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iment to learn to live so far from home. They had to experience being here to know what to do, and what not to do. Hey, it was an experiment, and they succeeded.

"And the artifacts tell us this."

The artifacts are evidence that:

The colonists fashioned copper jewelry, which was, along with Dutch and Venetian beads, the coin of the wilderness. They made bricks. They experimented with making glass. They made lead shot for their muskets. They made tools and implements from spare armor. They cleared perhaps as much as 40 acres of virgin forest and planted crops.

They attempted to raise horses, cows, hogs, goats, sheep, and chickens. They cut down trees to extend the palisades and sawed timber for homebuilding. Their first commercial export was a shipload of clapboard.

They hunted deer and wild turkeys. They fished for sturgeon, caught turtles, and dredged for oysters. They gathered fuel. They collected sassafras. They explored the Tidewater waterways.

They dug wells, clay pits, trenches, and cellars for the gunpowder magazine. They stood watch and manned block-houses near the fort. They built huts and houses and a church. They had to rebuild nearly everything after a disastrous fire in January 1607/08. They cared for the sick and buried the dead.

"There was a lot of activity going on. No doubt about that," Kelso said. "In the end, at least some of them succeeded. They survived. They survived hard times—and that took a lot of work. Sure, there were idle gentlemen and ineffective leaders. And, sure, the adventurers didn't find gold and failed to make a profit for the Virginia Company, but Jamestown was not, as one historian put it, 'a fiasco.'" He refers to Edmund S. Morgan, professor emeritus at Yale.

"Jamestown was permanent—except, of course, for about 30 hours, a lapse which doesn't trouble me," Kelso said.

The colonists, frustrated and weary, out of food, and many sick, left June 7, 1610, intending to return to England. That does not signal failure to Kelso. The refugee colonists who lived through the stark winter of 1609–10 were not resupplied until the arrival on May 23 of the company's acting governor, Thomas Gates. Shipwrecked in Bermuda the previous July, Gates came in two small makeshift vessels with 135 people who had been marooned with him for the past eight months.

Gates considered the situation at

Jamestown too dire and frail to recover and ordered its abandonment. They sailed away, but the ships were met the next day off Mulberry Island and turned back by Thomas West, Lord De La Warr, who sailed up with a load of supplies, 150 fresh settlers, and a commission to succeed Gates.

The number of people who began and survived the winter of 1609–10 at Jamestown is uncertain. Smith said there were "not past sixtie men, women and children" at Jamestown left alive, but some

had fled back to England or to the Indians, and some encamped downstream. But it is sure that those months would always be known as the Starving Time. Some English were reduced to cannibalism and eating rats. They were victims of a drought so severe that crops planted by settlers and natives withered, and forage was scarce. At the fort, where the river was salty, there was little potable water.

Dennis Blanton, director of the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research, and climatologists at the Uni-

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versity of Arkansas discovered the evidence of the drought while studying the growth rings of ancient cypress trees in Tidewater. They concluded that extraordinary conditions would have made life difficult between 1606 and 1612.

When Lord De La Warr, Gates, the Jamestown refugees, and the new settlers from England dropped anchor at Jamestown on what, according to their calendar, was June 10, 1610, the settlement was, as Kelso puts it, “a mess.” During the Starving Time the palisades and many dwellings had fallen into disrepair and the settlers didn’t bother to fix up the place they were about to leave.

In the afternoon shadows, the cellar house excavation, left, looks like a footprint in the earth scraped smooth by APVA archaeologists. The toes are steps to what might have been a storeroom or dungeon, which was used in 1610 as a trash pit. The trench to the left of the cellar marks an extension of the palisade of James Fort. Below, Ernelyn Marx works in the excavation. At the edge of the nearby river, the foundations of John White’s warehouse of 1644, far right, are protected by an aluminum and fabric dome. The loose bricks are from a fallen chimney.

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“We know that Gates ordered buried some armament because there was no room for it aboard ship. And the departing colonists left behind broken equipment and things that would be useless on their sea journey. I imagine,” Kelso said, “there was a lot of stuff scattered about when De La Warr set the sailors to unload ships and the ‘the landmen to cleanse the town.’”

“There was, at Jamestown, a general housecleaning,” Kelso said. Gates and De La Warr imposed military law and required everyone to pitch in and put the settlement in order. They collected trash and unwanted items and tossed everything into a cellar house just beyond the fort’s eastern palisade.

Nick Lucchetti, director of field projects for the Jamestown Rediscovery, measures the cellar house at about 25 feet, north to south, 14 feet wide, and 7 feet deep. Dirt steps lead to a dirt floor. At the end opposite the steps there is an extension of the cellar, another compartment dug later. Post holes for the structure over the cellar have been located. There is a clear mark of a barrel that sat on the floor. A fire had been built on the floor. There is speculation that the cellar could have been used as a dungeon. Could

this be where John Smith revived a captive Indian suspected of the theft of a pistol, who was overcome by smoke and fumes from a charcoal fire? The captain dosed him with a strong shot of “aqua vitae and vinegar”—thus earning a reputation among the Indians as having godlike power to restore life. “Could be,” Kelso said, “but we don’t know for sure.”

“It is obvious this cellar house was filled at one time with stuff from the fort and everything in it dates from 1610 or before,” Lucchetti said. “We found in this hole in the ground lots of copper, weapons, sections of breastplates, pike heads, helmets, a sword pommel, pieces of cut-up and refashioned armor, pieces of muskets and crossbows, English and Dutch coins, animal bones, broken delftware, glass trading beads, clay pipestems.” The material is similar to a cache of pre-1610 artifacts, found in a pit within the palisade walls that was excavated in 1994. Lucchetti said that about 100,000 artifacts have been lifted from the cellar hole. “The number is astounding,” Kelso said. “I never thought we’d recover things that are so old in these amounts—much to our delight.”

Adjacent to the cellar hole, nearer the riverside and just downstream from the

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fort's easternmost bulwark, archaeologists in 1998 excavated the brick foundation of what they believe is a warehouse built in 1644 by John White, a leading merchant and politician. It symbolizes, Kelso said, the evolution of Jamestown from military camp to commercial port. This excavation of a cobblestone foundation, brickwork, and fallen brick has been kept open, protected by an aluminum and fabric dome, so that visitors may get an understanding and appreciation of the knowledge archaeology yields.

But months spent excavating the depth of White's 50-by-30-foot warehouse and the cellar hole slowed expanding the horizontal search for additional evidence of the triangular palisade and eastward extensions of it. The digging also delayed the search for evidence of earthfast buildings within the fort. The next season of fieldwork, which begins in April 2000, will concentrate on plotted 10-foot grid squares nearer the ruin of a 17th-century church tower—the Old Church Tower—and adjacent to the half-exposed brick foundation where Kelso picked up the jetons. “We’ve got to uncover big spaces before we can understand James Fort,” Kelso said.

The area immediately beside an earth fortification built in 1861 by slaves for a garrison of Confederate soldiers will be left alone for now. The undisturbed ground directly beneath the dirt mound could be rich in artifacts, but space adjacent to it was too disturbed to be of much archaeological value. When the fortification—called Fort Pocahontas and after 1862 manned as a Union outpost—was erected, colonial artifacts were dug up, but were treated as curiosities and carried off as souvenirs.

ARTIFACTS UNCOVERED at Jamestown not only illustrate what the settlers did, but also show what they looked like. Kelso has uncovered from within James Fort the skeletons of two early settlers—a man, who was assigned the archaeologist's toe-tag of JR102C, and a woman, JR156C. Remarkable as it may seem, Kelso has a pretty good idea who they were and, with the help of a sculptor-anthropologist using computer imaging, their facial appearance.

The man may be Stephen Calthrop, a 22-year-old nobleman, who, Kelso said, may have been shot while he was on guard duty the night of August 15, 1607. A .60-caliber lead ball shattered his right tibia and fibula, and he bled to death. Kelso

postulates that Calthrop was murdered, perhaps with the knowledge of Edward Maria Wingfield, president of the colony's ruling council, because Calthrop plotted mutiny with Smith while the settlers were enroute to Virginia. The plot seems not to have been executed, but Smith said Wingfield offered to hang him. Kelso's conclusion has not set well with Wingfield's descendants.

The woman may be the wife of Thomas Forrest, who with her maid Anne Burras, joined her husband at Jamestown on September 29, 1608. Mistress Forrest—her Christian name is unknown—was about 35, which at that time was an old age. Burras married carpenter John Layton that December, and their child Virginia, born the following September, was the first English baby at Jamestown.

“This is where science and history get personal,” Kelso said. “When you actually can see the features of the earliest settlers, Jamestown becomes not just a place, but more a gathering of brave and

rugged people.”

A plastic re-creation of Calthrop's skeleton and a reconstructed model of his face are exhibited in the Thomas Dale House, the APVA's relic house at the island's sea wall, built about a century ago to halt the shore's erosion.

THE JAMESTOWN ARTIFACTS are studied, preserved, and stored in a climate-controlled laboratory that has been added to the Yeardley House, the APVA caretaker's house. The Yeardley House also has been restored and refurbished for offices—a \$500,000 project completed in autumn 1999. Built for the 1907 anniversary of Jamestown, it is named for Sir George Yeardley, who succeeded Lord De La Warr as governor, and fashioned, it is said, to resemble Sir Walter Raleigh's home.

From her sunlit office in the Yeardley House, Bly Straube identifies the objects Kelso and his crew uncover. She is, in Kelso's judgment, “the authority on

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early 17th-century artifacts found in the United States.”

In metal cabinet drawers are stored the mundane things like arrow heads and musket balls, and unexpected things that surprise, delight, and mystify, such as an engraved silver pick used to scrape and scoop wax out of ears. Straube holds it to show that it is in the shape of a mythological sea rhinoceros, an example of elegance in the wilds.

Another treasure is a fragment of an ivory pocket compass and sundial that just might have belonged to Smith. Although ownership may be impossible to establish, Straube notes that it is calibrated for the latitudes that span North-

ern Italy and parts of Hungary, places Smith had traveled before joining the expedition to Virginia.

Also among the unexpected finds are two religious medallions, one with images of Mary with the Child Jesus. “These are Catholic medallions, perhaps indicating that the English were tolerant in that they permitted Catholic sailors or artisans to wear them,” Straube said.

Straube is fond of showing off pieces of Spanish olive jars—a few glued together almost complete. “These were the barrels of the time, in which wine and vinegar, beans and nuts were shipped,” Straube said.

There is a German distilling vessel, French wine flasks, and Chinese wine cups. And there are Dutch and Venetian trading beads—“the blue ones were favored,” she said.

The armor and weapons are English and because the English emptied their storerooms to outfit the colonists, Straube has examples of breast plates, sword

handles, and other military equipment not found in English museums.

Photographs and narrative descriptions of Straube’s inventory are being posted on the Internet so the Jamestown artifacts can be studied and analyzed by any scholar or student sitting in front of a computer.

Among those who have become intrigued with the archaeological work at Jamestown are Roxane Gilmore, the wife of Virginia Governor James Gilmore and an archaeologist herself; Jeannie Baliles, wife of former Governor Gerald Baliles; and crime novelist Patricia Cornwell. Each has participated in the dig and together, with Kelso, visited museums and conservation laboratories in England and Ireland.

The conjecture about the musket-ball-death of Calthrop has captured Cornwell’s attention. She plans to introduce an archaeologist in her next Kay Scarpetta novel. Scarpetta is a fictional Richmond medical examiner and Cornwell’s international bestsellers have locales in Virginia.

Apparently,” Kelso said, “the archaeologist will be Scarpetta’s next love interest who helps her solve crimes that took place a long time ago.” Whether the fictional archaeologist digs at Jamestown remains to be known.

Archaeologists like Kelso, Lucchetti, and Gilmore are more interested in solving the mysteries of Jamestown, mysteries of historic importance—and they are up against the 2007 deadline.

Meanwhile, the APVA and the National Park Service are developing a master plan for the presentation of Jamestown during the quadricentennial year. Preliminary ideas for the erection of a new visitor center on the island are being reviewed by the public and interested agencies. The present visitor center, dedicated in 1957, could be demolished.

Just how the remains of James Fort—covered for protection after their exposure—will be interpreted for the festivities has not been decided. First, Kelso needs to find more evidence of the inland palisades and the structures that were within them.

“Who knows what we’ll find?” Kelso said. “The possibilities are amazing. Almost endless.” ▲

Will Molineux



At left, Bly Straube, Jamestown Rediscovery curator, admires the patched together earthenware pieces of a London distilling flask. At right, on a day when waterproof tarps protect the cellar house, Kelso and National Park Service intern Ted Wolf discuss the challenges of archaeology.

Will Molineux is a longtime Virginia Tidewater journalist and writer on historical topics. This is his debut contribution to the journal.